

## Momentum Builds for a Constitutional Convention



By Blair Bobier

[The Political Reform Blog](#): A standing room only crowd packed a hotel ballroom in the state capital yesterday to consider plans for a Constitutional Convention to overhaul California's clearly dysfunctional government. Over three hundred people answered the call for a Summit concerning the political future of California, which *Sacramento Bee* columnist and panelist Dan Walters referred to as "the most complex and diverse society in the history of humankind."

The California Constitutional Convention Summit, co-sponsored by the New America Foundation, was striking in its enthusiasm for fundamental political reform.

Is there a danger that delegates to a Constitutional Convention will be too radical in the reforms

they propose? "The danger is they won't be bold enough," according to Dan Walters.

Coming so closely after the budget meltdown, there was, not surprisingly, seemingly universal support for doing away with the 2/3's rule for passing budgets and raising taxes. One Republican panelist was perhaps the only noticeable voice of dissent on that issue.

Otherwise, ideas for reform came from all over the place. Even California's Lt. Governor, John Garamendi, got into the act with a call for a unicameral legislature.

My colleague, New America's Mark Paul, who spoke on a panel about priorities for reform, cited three standards by which a government can be measured: accountability, effective representation, and fiscal responsibility. California fails all three, he said. Mark laid out a case for using [proportional representation](#) as a way to elect the legislature and address these failures. The call for proportional representation was echoed by many conference attendees in their comments and questions from the floor.

Common Cause's Derek Cressman and Bob Stern from the Center for Government Studies both addressed the need for reforming the initiative system-though not in ways that seem to be commonly discussed. Both said voters need to get more, better, and more balanced information about measures which will appear on the ballot. Stern suggested that the legislature consider initiatives while they are in the signature-verification stage. That way, if the legislature chooses to act on the initiative, and the proponents of the initiative agree, the measure could be taken off the ballot, sparing everyone a lot of time and money. It's a good, common-sense idea that warrants consideration.

Antonio Gonzalez, the president of the William C. Velasquez Institute, another co-sponsor of the event, said it was critical to "engage young Black, Brown and Asian" people in the political reform process and he, of course, is absolutely right. Gonzalez was admirably forward-looking and said we have to look at the future of California's demographics. "The kids of today's twenty-five year-olds will be most affected by what is done," he said.

The Summit drew substantial [media coverage](#) in print and on television and radio. The Bay Area Council, the primary sponsor of the event, plans to take the show on the road and hold a similar Summit in Southern California and possibly in other areas of the state.